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ABSTRACT

Many large Japanese-owned multinational corporations have established successful subsidiaries in the United States, but distinct ethnic and cultural differences have caused communication problems between Japanese managers and American laborers and business people. Many top executives of the Japanese subsidiaries are sent to the United States on a temporary basis from the parent company in Japan. They often do not have adequate skills in English and are often inexperienced in working with heterogeneous groups, such as the racially mixed labor force found in many American factories. Japanese businesses also operate on a culturally ingrained principle of consensus, in which all labor and management personnel participate in decision making. Americans in middle management in these subsidiaries find this principle inefficient and time consuming. The immediate reaction by American business people is that Japanese managers should adopt American management methods. But, in spite of the communication problems, the Japanese management methods may have a great deal to offer in revitalizing the American business economy. Japanese and American businesses should learn from each other the most efficient but "culturally compatible" methods for running businesses in the United States. (HTH)

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN JAPANESE MULTINATIONALS

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INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS IN JAPANESE MULTINATIONALS

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Since the early 1970's, many large Japanese multinational corporations have established their subsidiaries in the United States. Along with the capital investment and technology, they have introduced and experimented with the unique Japanese style of management and industrial practices. Despite the distinct differences in cultural orientations, ethnic backgrounds, and in language between those of Japanese managers and American subordinates, these Japanese operations are considered extremely successful in terms of providing employee satisfaction and increasing efficiency and productivity. Consequently, American scholars and business executives have begun to take a keen interest in the transferability of Japanese management practices into the American environment. Recently, many books and articles have been written on the "secrets of success" of Japanese multinational corporations such as paternalistic management-employee relations, concensus style of decision-making, group-oriented work ethics, and total commitment and loyalty of workers.

However, these factors of "the imported Japanese corporate culture" are contradictory to such basic American values as egalitarianism, individualism, competitiveness, social mobility, rationality and pragmatism, and the traditional American management practices. In other words, Americans who work for the Japanese subsidiaries must either be "unique individuals" who can readily make necessary adaptations or those who are forced to hang on to their present jobs as they have no alternatives due to the prolonged recession in the particular sector of the U.S. industries.[1]

At the same time, it is a new and often frustrating experience for the majority of Japanese managers in the U.S. subsidiaries to manage American subordinates because they have had little or no previous managerial experience in the American cultural context. Besides, they recognize that Japan has adopted, and will continue to seek, a considerable amount of knowledge and expertise in management science and techno-

logy. In fact, the theories of American organizational specialists such as Resis Likert, Peter Drucker, Chris Argyris, Douglas McGregor, and Frederick Herzberg are widely known and used in large Japanese firms. Japanese managers are often surprised to find that these organizational theories are not diligently followed by many American managers.[2] Then, the highly acclaimed "efficient Japanese management practices" transplanted back into the Japanese subsidiaries in the United States are the fruits of modern American management ideas that were grafted and grown successfully on the rather traditional Japanese business and industrial culture.

This paper is an attempt to identify and analyze specific intercultural communication problems that both Japanese managers and their American subordinates may encounter in their daily interactions within this particular Japanese corporate culture.

Nature of the Japanese Multinational Corporation

By the standards of American or European multinationals, Japanese multinationals are "immature" at least in two important aspects. They neither hire non-Japanese executive talent nor acquire necessary capital from local sources. All of their top executives and managers are sent from the parent companies, and monies for direct investment are also sent from the headquarters in Japan. They are not autonomous or semi-autonomous operations, but are locked in a strong hierarchical relationship with their parent companies. An overseas Japanese subsidiary is analogous to a branch family, one not of direct lineage which is inferior to the main house. In the Japanese corporate organization, the subordinate position of a subsidiary is further reinforced by a pattern of personnel management practices. This pattern consists of using the subsidiaries for havens for those managers who have reached the compulsory retirement age at the parent company or those who are younger but of limited competence. Therefore, there is a tendency for the parent company to impose its will on the subsidiaries.[3]

All of the managers and supervisors sent overseas are dispatched from the home office "on loan" (shikko) and they maintain strong official ties with their former section or department. In essence, their assignment is a "prolonged overseas business trip" and theoretically they can

return to their former position when they complete the overseas assignment. They even receive two paychecks--one from the home office (base pay plus semi-annual bonuses) and another one for their overseas living allowances and expenses.

Japanese multinationals have a far greater number of Japanese managers occupying almost all key positions or comparable to that of their American counterparts. In some cases, even first-line supervisory positions in the Japanese manufacturing plants are held by Japanese, with the exception of jobs relating to labor and personnel.[4] They also prefer to hire local Japanese expatriates and Japanese-Americans. The main reason for this practice is that these people are able to establish better communication as they come from the same or similar cultural backgrounds. The heavy use of Japanese managers is a source of serious resentment against Japanese multinational enterprises in the United States.[5]

A typical human organization of the Japanese multinationals could be made up of Japanese top executives and managers, Caucasian-American middle management and clerical staff, and Black-American or Mexican-American factory workers, although the racial makeup may differ depending on the particular local community in which it is located. This heterogeneous composition of the employees causes apprehension and even anxiety on the part of Japanese managers, as they come from a homogeneous society and have no previous experience in working with other ethnic groups. The Japanese are considered as "honorary whites" in the United States in this particular context, but in the minds of many Americans who work for Japanese enterprises abroad, the images of Japanese as investors and managers are not well established. It seems that those Americans who work under their Japanese superiors feel psychologically uncomfortable, for they still remember the Japanese as their enemy in World War II, as immigrant laborers, poor foreign students or as "sneaky businessmen" who copied everything from America. The Japanese themselves might feel somewhat awkward in giving American subordinates specific instructions and in evaluating their job performance, because they may still suffer from an inferiority complex toward Americans.[6] In addition, the Japanese managers cannot expect to have groups of employees with many years of experience who are unconditionally loyal to their companies, because the Japanese multinationals have a relatively short history in the United States.

Due to the fact that Japanese corporations have extremely strong ties with their banks in Japan, they finance all of their overseas investments, with few exceptions, through their main banks. This practice, in turn, creates a situation in which overseas Japanese subsidiaries must depend upon their respective parent companies for all of the capital and operating expenses until they become financially independent.

Characteristics of Overseas Japanese Businessmen

The majority of Japanese managers and supervisors are in their late twenties or early thirties, and sometimes they lack experience even though they are adequately qualified and competent. They are assigned to overseas jobs because they can be "spared" from the home office operation and because they are young and psychologically flexible enough to make necessary personal adjustments in a foreign environment. Quite often, they are "management trainees" who are expected to learn English and American business practices. On the average, they are usually assigned for a three-year period, although some may stay for five years or more. They rarely wish to remain abroad for a long period of time due to a fear that they may lose their personal ties with those who are at the home office. "The absence or loss of tangibility from the main body for an extended period of time invariably means the erosion of this all-critical social asset. . . .Group unity is maintained (in the Japanese corporate culture) by strong emphasis on emotional commitment. An appeal to emotion, though most effective, requires constant face-to-face contact."[7] They also worry about missing a timely opportunity to get promoted while they are away, since promotion is usually based on seniority in Japan.

A much smaller number of senior members, who are in their late thirties and early forties, are assigned to top management positions in overseas Japanese ventures. They are given high status and a big title, such as "President," "Vice President," "Managing Director," and "General Manager" while they are working in the United States. They are given generous overseas allowances, are allowed to live in a plush condominium or big house, drive a full-size luxury car, become members of exclusive country clubs or civic organizations, and to frequent high class restaurants all at the company's expense. Their home office in Japan strongly feels that the Japanese executives should have living standards comparable

to those of their American counterparts. And all of these luxuries are necessary because they must entertain royally and take care of a large number of visitors from Japan, including top management from the home office. Top executives in Japan have the privilege of using a chauffer-driven car for their commuting, business calls, and social outings. They also have generous entertainment allowances at their disposal to entertain their clients and subordinates as well.

However, these managers did not usually hold executive positions at home, and they cannot expect to go back to the home office with the same positions they held overseas. Consequently, even senior managers with overseas ventures do not have the same authority and influence their colleagues in Japan may have. At best, their status was of a section chief or an assistant department head within the home office heirarchy. In some instances, older managers in their mid-fifties may be assigned to overseas subsidiaries and are given "titular positions" before their retirement.

This sudden promotion to high executive positions and the rapid rise in their socio-economic status often cause these young Japanese managers to have a false sense of authority and undesirable attitudes of arrogance or overconfidence when, in fact, they are not bona fide executives in many respects. They are, with few exceptions, not capable of effectively and efficiently conducting business and socializing with top American business executives as true representatives of their parent company. The apparent disparity in the amounts of compensations and allowances paid to the "home-office-dispatched managers" and those paid to the "locally-hired managers" also becomes a cause of interpersonal jealousy and dissatisfaction, especially among the Japanese expatriate managers.

The most serious drawback of their predicament is that they must always worry about their future promotions and placement upon return to Japan. They usually do not resign and work for another company for self-advancement, even though they might have acquired marketable managerial skills during their overseas assignment. Consequently, they must spend working days and weekends for sightseeing, golfing, nightclubbing, and entertaining many V.I.P. visitors from Japan. For these reasons, Japanese managers usually do not have a strong sense of commitment and the

foreign subsidiary which they work for. The lack of commitment and the psychological ambivalence cause the development of a "three-year-mentality." This feeling of occupying a temporary position is not only counter-productive, but also extremely detrimental in maintaining good morale among the locally hired staff and workers.[8]

Another distinguishable characteristic of overseas Japanese is the strong attachment to local Japanese communities. Japanese businessmen who are stationed in large American cities seek out each other and organize Japanese businessmen's clubs, golf clubs, tennis clubs, mahjong clubs, and other social clubs among themselves. It is also not unusual to find that many Japanese firms are concentrated in a few downtown office buildings. There are many restaurants and bars which cater exclusively to Japanese businessmen. They hold golf tournaments and dinner parties attended only by the Japanese. Japanese families live in the same locality or in the same apartment building, and form a "Japanese community away from home." Their wives tend to get together among themselves for various social activities. This is the reason why the Japanese have acquired a bad reputation for sticking together in their own groups, particularly in their activities outside their work.

Linguistic and Cultural Barriers of Communication

Almost all Japanese companies with any international business operations have company-sponsored English classes or give financial assistance to those employees who wish to study English. Those who are assigned to work in overseas subsidiaries are usually given several weeks of intensive English lessons prior to their departure. However, the average Japanese businessman does not have a good command of English. He usually lacks adequate skills in speaking and in listening comprehension of English. In other words, he has a critical weakness as manager because he is handicapped when he speaks English to his subordinates in face-to-face communication situations. His English may have a thick Japanese accent or it may even be difficult to understand. Yet, he is sent abroad to manage an overseas venture. His assignment is based on an erroneous assumption that anybody can learn English within several months if he is thrown into an English-speaking environment.

The whole irony of this situation is that his poor command of English

not only makes interpersonal communication extremely difficult but also makes his American subordinates doubt his effectiveness and look down on him. This contempt, no matter how slight it may be, can create undesirable situations. Some American subordinates may not respect their Japanese superiors as much as they should, because Japanese managers speak "funny English." They may even poke fun at their mispronunciation, improper accents, and poor grammar, even though they cannot speak Japanese at all. And to make matters worse, most Japanese managers are extremely apprehensive and even doubt their ability to communicate in English, although some others may try to cover up the feelings of inadequacy by "proudly" speaking broken English. Consequently, the majority of the Japanese managers in the United States heavily depend upon their Japanese-speaking staff assistants for interpreting and translating their messages into English when speaking with their American subordinates. This heavy dependence on a bilingual staff tends to reduce their effectiveness as managers. By this action they are openly admitting that they are deficient in communication competency, which is one of the most important managerial skills.

A simple way to overcome this linguistic barrier seems to be the assigning of only English-speaking managers to overseas positions. But it is not an easy task for any Japanese multinational company to find a large number of employees who have both technical competence and adequate language facility. Although every Japanese businessman has studied English for at least ten years before he graduated from his college and even more after graduation, he is not well-trained in spoken English. The methods of teaching English and the English textbooks used are extremely poor, and a large number of English teachers in Japan cannot speak English very well.[9] The teaching of spoken English in Japan is handled by thousands of Eikaiwa Gakuen or "English conversation schools" located in major cities throughout Japan. These schools employ many native speakers of English as instructors. A typical curriculum at an Eikaiwa Gakuen includes the study of pronunciation and intonation drills, grammar, translation, and memorization of situational dialogues. In addition, the Japan Broadcasting Corporation and many other TV and radio stations carry daily programs of English conversation, reading and grammar to their home audiences. There are thousands of English conversation textbooks and a wide variety of cassette tape programs for home study that can be purchased. Despite the

availability of these learning materials, the level of oral English competence of a large number of Japanese businessmen is not byond that of conversational English. They are not trained in interpersonal communication, conference methods, interviewing, and public speaking as their American counterparts might have been. But with a few exceptions, speech education, as it is known in the United States, does not exist in the classrooms of accredited Japanese universities and colleges.[10]

The insularity of Japanese society also makes it difficult for the Japanese students of English to practice English with native speakers. Most likely, many of the Japanese businessmen have never had enough opportunities to speak English until they are actually assigned to their overseas positions.

Another obvious solution seems to be to hire many American-educated Japanese young men and women. However, they are not welcomed by many Japanese multinational companies because they tend to be "too Americanized" and much older. Large Japanese corporations still prefer to hire new college graduates directly from prestigious Japanese universities and "indoctrinate" them into their respective corporate cultures. Hiring of the older American-educated men is difficult, though they may be undoubtedly proficient in English and familiar with American culture, because they must be given a larger starting salary. This special treatment given to them will violate the seniority-based wage system and disrupt the internal harmony of these companies.

Still one other factor which works against the Japanese people's learning of English is a certain contempt for those Japanese who really master a foreign language. They are suspected of being superficial and too Westernized, and of having lost their identity as Japanese. They are often accused of losing their command of the Japanese language and are labeled as Eigyo-ya or "English users" who do not have other professional skills and "true" Japanese personality characteristics.[11] This is the reason why most Japanese companies place far less emphasis on one's ability to speak English when selecting a candidate for an overseas position.

The most difficult cultural barrier of communication is the nature of interpersonal relationships among the Japanese themselves. The maintenance of a close relationship requires constant dealings with each other.

People must meet frequently to develop strong group feelings, and they usually develop exclusive attitudes. Japanese managers and supervisors working for the same overseas subsidiary tend to get together for every lunch and go out every evening for socializing. Some American managers and workers become suspicious of their constant meetings in Japanese, because they are excluded from any discussions in Japanese. When the Japanese managers have visitors from Japan, they will spend more time speaking in Japanese among themselves. Sometimes, the Americans even begin to suspect that the Japanese managers are keeping secrets from them by intentionally speaking to each other in Japanese, since they have to wait for the "edited" information translated into English.

Imported Japanese Management Practices

One of the most notable Japanese management practices is the unique management-employee relations or "management familism."[12] Under this practice, a company is a large extended family which is organized in a neat hierarchy with its president as "family head," executives as "wise uncles," managers as "hard-working big brothers," and workers as "obedient and loyal children." It is assumed, by both management and labor, that employment will be on a lifetime basis. Dismissal or layoff of these "family members," even during a business recession, is never considered. Every member's role is to make maximum contributions during his entire working life toward the organizational goals, no matter what his special ability of particular assignment may be.

This practice seems to be incompatible with the economic rationale of any American business, but it is not totally incompatible or irrational for Japanese business organizations. The benevolent management attitude inevitably cultivates high morale and loyalty among the employees and, in turn, they promote efficiency and high productivity.

In recent years, this management-employee practice is hailed by many observers of American management and labor as a "new Japanese export" which may revolutionize American labor practices.[13] It is certainly a welcome change for those Americans who work for Japanese subsidiaries, because their former American employers might have always focused their managerial decisions on output and profit rather than on the workers' welfare. However, this new idea of "company-familism" cannot be totally compatible with

the traditional American values, particularly those of individualism, competitiveness, and social mobility. Under this system, the concept of "equal pay for equal work" does not exist because workers are rewarded on seniority and team work rather than on individual merits. Competition among individual workers is discouraged to promote a cohesive work atmosphere, and resignations for better job opportunities with other companies are severely criticized. Conformity, not individual self-development, is emphasized in this context. "Social conformity to the Japanese is no sign of weakness but rather the proud, tempered product of inner strength."[14] Almost all Japanese subsidiaries in the United States openly discourage their employees from organizing labor unions for fear that they may become militant against the Japanese management as other American unions are. Some companies assidiously persuaded the workers not to organize unions by holding informal sessions to explain company positions and urging them to propose ways of improving working conditions.[15]

Many Japanese multinationals in the United States successfully introduced company-sponsored social and recreational activities for their American employees. Company-wide barbeque picnics, Christmas parties, anniversary festivals, annual dinner-dance parties, softball games, basketball games, bowling clubs, and golf tournaments are all paid for by the companies. Top management, middle management, and all workers have ample opportunites to informally meet and get acquainted with each other at these social gatherings. At the same time, the Japanese companies try to instill in the American workers the Japanese work ethic, the company creed, and discipline through intensive training and indoctrination.[16] For example, the work is never finished at five o'clock even for American managers and supervisors. They are not required to, but tacitly expected to work longer hours. The Japanese managers have almost total disregard for closing time and devote much of their waking hours to their jobs when necessary. After work, the Japanese managers and supervisors frequently continue their business meetings over dinner and drinks. They also entertain out-of-town visitors during evening hours and on weekends. Sometimes, American managers feel obligated to join them, too. Most Japanese companies have their company creeds and songs translated into English for American workers. Although the American workers may not

recite the creeds and sing the company songs every morning, they are expected to know the lofty philosophy and goals for which they must strive.[17]

Different Styles of Decision-Making and Conference Methods

The traditional style of Japanese decision-making called "ringi-seido" or "group decision-making" is very different from that of American decision-making. The term ringi means to "circulate a written proposal for approval" by managers at different levels of management, and seido means "system." Under this system, a low echelon manager or supervisor drafts a written proposal complete with supporting data called a "ringisho" in consultation with top management and with those managers who will be affected by the forthcoming decision. The proposal then is circulated in "right order" within the corporate hierarchy, and each manager evaluates it and affixes his sea (han) of approval or he holds it off if he cannot approve it for some reason. In actual practice, however, the initiator of this proposal personally negotiates with each of these managers and obtains a prior consensus through nemawashi or "informal consultation." It is inconceivable for Japanese managers to make any decisions without consulting the internal workings of the organization because the ringi-seido builds and maintains group harmony and solidarity. In the Japanese corporate culture, it is also a means for the middle management to participate in the "scrutinization" of the top management's decisions that may have long-range implications for the company. The middle management, in addition to acting as supervisors of day-to-day operations, the middle-level managers are "planning aides and advisors" to the top management. They may politely disagree or question the top management's decisions on various key issues. In turn, the top echelon is expected to take an active interest in the details of the middle-management activities without actual involvement. Indeed, there is a deep-rooted feeling that the company belongs to all of its members, and the middle management feels that it should behave as a trustee for the collective interests of its members. In fact, the conceptual demarcation of roles between top management and middle management is not clearly spelled out in Japanese companies.[18] Even at the lowest rank-and-file levels, Japanese workers maintain not only the broadest commitment to their company's goals, but also a long-term interest and vision in their company's future.

American managers working for Japanese subsidiaries who had previous managerial experience elsewhere may find it difficult to make necessary psychological and philosophical adjustments to this unique Japanese style of decision-making. In the typical American corporate culture, every manager is given a specific job description with his authority and responsibility clearly spelled out, and he is allowed to make decisions on his own. He may consult with his superiors, colleages, or subordinates from time to time, but he can make final decisions without others' consent. But in the Japanese corporate culture, he must follow the more cumbersome and time-consuming style of decision-making patterned after the ringi-seido. In fact, a recent research study on five subsidiaries in the United States shows the frustrations of their American managers:

"I don't believe we are used to accomodating ourselves to a consensus. We express our opinions and those opinions are either accepted or rejected by our superior. That's the way it is.

"Here, everybody gets involved in decision-making. . . .In the working environment I was in before, I could make a decision on my own and take action. If it was wrong, I would be in trouble. But if it was right, at least the decision was made quickly and the problem solved.

"Certainly, it's much different than I am accustomed to. The American style is that if a decision is needed, you have a person to go to and get a decision. We had clearly defined areas and responsibilities. But the new [Japanese] style is overlapping these responsibilities. You may not know exactly where to go. It may mean talking to several people to get some decisions."[19]

On the other hand, those Japanese managers working in the United States are so wedded to the traditional managerial system of Japan that they would find it impossible to manage an overseas organization without the support of subordinates who share the same style of decision-making. They are used to having ideas generated from below and to relying heavily on the consensus process of decision-making.[20] This is one of the reasons why Japanese multinationals send a team of five or more management staff to their overseas subsidiaries. The management is a "mini-scale Japanese corporate organization" with representatives from major divisions or departments who are assigned to assist its president by performing the same functions as they did back in Japan.

The mechanics of decision-making in overseas Japanese subsidiaries is further complicated because most large Japanese multinationals have an internal organizational unit called "Kaigai Jigyobu" which functions as an advisory staff. Unlike international divisions of American corporations, it has no direct profit responsibility but is responsible for formally monitoring overseas subsidiaries. The Kaigai Jigyobu has duties of record-keeping, performance evaluation, personnel affairs management, and inter-organizational communication. For administrative reasons, all of the management and technical personnel sent abroad are first formally "transferred" on paper to the Kaigai Jigyobu, then reassigned to appropriate posts overseas. This process is vital in Japanese corporate culture as it assigns to the Kaigai Jigyobu the formal responsibility for supervising those persons sent abroad. It also allows them to maintain their multiple loyalty to the Kaigai Jigyobu and to whatever division or department from which they are "loaned." Under this arrangement, the overseas Japanese managers can continue to rely on the informal stock of personal credit that they have built up with various individuals at the home office.[21] The Kaigai Jigyobu, then, is an added link of communication between the home office and its overseas subsidiaries. Consequently, all communication from the subsidiaries must go through this division before it reaches the top management and other departments for any decision or action to be taken. The transfer of information and data is usually delayed further because all of this must be translated into Japanese at the Kaigai Jigyobu before distribution.

In addition, the Japanese managers in overseas subsidiaries are seriously handicapped by their inability to engage in extended, personal, and informal discussions and to obtain various views and reactions to a tentative proposal from relevant groups on an informal basis before it is officially submitted for approval. To overcome this handicap, the senior manager of a subsidiary begins his informal discussions by letter, telephone, or telex messages with individuals and groups in the parent company; meanwhile, the junior managers and technical staff personnel also start informal exploratory discussions, on their own, regarding aspects of the proposal for which they are responsible. They often write personal letters to their "friends" at the home office, in addition to the official correspondence which the senior manager may send later.[22] A junior over-

seas manager dispatched from the finance department asks his superior, colleagues, or subordinates in Japan to cooperate with him and help his manager in seeking a consensus for the forthcoming proposal at the home office. Another manager from the research and development department may go to his home department to seek his friends' assistance, and still others go to their own respective departments for their support and cooperation. All of these efforts are necessary because managers of every division and department at the home office will be involved whenever major decisions for its foreign subsidiary are being considered and nemawashi or "informal consultations" and prior consensus are prerequisites for quick actions by those who are concerned. Apparently, communication between the home office and its overseas subsidiaries is an extremely time-consuming process, but this process is indispensible in the present Japanese corporate culture. Even though some Japanese managers may claim that they are given total freedom in managing the foreign subsidiary to which they are assigned, they fully understand that no major decisions will be made without appropriate consultations with the home office.

This unique consensus style of decision-making is also practiced in intraorganizational communication to the dismay of many American managers working for Japanese subsidiaries. Several causes for their frustration definitely derive from the sharp differences between the Japanese and American decision-making styles. Their complaints are (1) too many management meetings; (2) too many people involved, whether or not some of them are directly related to the task in question; (3) everybody is involved in everything--no one person controls the decision-making process; (4) many of the ambiguities are not openly clarified during these meetings; (5) decisions are not promptly made during management meetings, so meetings on the proposal are numerous--making such decisions time-consuming.

The behavioral differences between Japanese and American managers in conference situations can be explained, in part, by the decision-makers' motives or attitudes. "Safety, security, or avoidance of blame are the major motives for the Japanese managers, while the American managers are motivated to resort to action based on such motives as achievement, accomplishment, and superiority. . . .The Japanese tend to be very careful, deliberate, and thorough in analyzing problems, whereas the Americans

tend to risk success against losses and are willing to live with the consequences."[23]

Another explanation is that the Japanese managers are overly concerned with interpersonal harmony and face-saving in face-to-face conferences. They carefully avoid argumentative discussion of issues for fear that such behavior may disrupt the well-established, harmonious interpersonal relationships among those managers at present. They usually refrain from asking direct questions or criticizing someone openly, because they may inadvertantly cause their superiors or colleagues to lose face in front of other participants. At the same time, Japanese managers, more often, will take criticisms and objections against them as personal attacks rather than objective criticism of the issues under discussion. Their extreme sensitivity toward each other's public image or face is increased when they must speak in broken English.

Still another explanation can be that some Japanese managers may use the traditional Japanese management perspective of using "ambiguity as a managerial tool.[24] Skilled Japanese managers intentionally use ambiguity or indirectness in directing their subordinates because the ambiguity gives more time for the subordinates to explore, experiment, and collect more data for their original idea until they can come up with a better idea. They keep their intentions secret, ask many questions, pursue facts and information, and try to nudge them into the right direction, although they may sometimes end up changing their own positions as the result of frequent dialogues with the subordinates. Occasionally, they may criticize their subordinates' work, but they will not corner them and cause them to become defensive. When they say, "I'd like to reflect on your proposal for a while," when the decision must be soon, it means, "You are dead wrong, and you'd better come up with a better idea very soon. But I don't tell you so, because you should know that yourself!"

This indirectness or agreeable style of the Japanese managers is often misunderstood as "underhanded communication behavior by their American subordinates. However, this implicit dimension of Japanese interpersonal communication must be clearly understood and appreciated by the Americans working for the Japanese businesses in the United States.

SUMMARY

Obviously, both Japanese managers and their American subordinates working for the Japanese multinational corporations must cope with and resolve many intercultural communication problems. These problems seem to have been caused by the unique relationship between the home office and its subsidiary patterned after the traditional Japanese corporate hierarchy, the unique personnel management practices, the poor image of Japanese businessmen, the linguistic and cultural barriers of communication, the nature of interpersonal relationships among the Japanese businessmen at home and abroad, and the vastly different styles of decision-making and conference methods.

The immediate reaction by the average American businessman against these problems may be that the Japanese managers should immediately adopt the American way of management while they are in the United States, but it is too demanding a request to make of them because they come from a completely different business subculture. On the contrary, they may even insist that American businesses ought to learn from the "the secrets of Japan's success" in order to revitalize the declining U. S. economy.

Perhaps the best solution for these problems would be that the Japanese and the American businessmen learn from each other the most efficient but "culturally compatible" methods of running a successful multinational business in the United States.

FOOTNOTES

[1] "Americans in Japanese Corporations: Views on Working for a Non-American Company in the U. S." Economic World (December 1979), 38-43.

[2] Robert E. Cole, "Learning from the Japanese: Prospects and Pitfalls," Management Review (September 1980), 24.

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[4] Ibid., p. 176.

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[6] Kazuo Nishiyama, Communication In International Business (Tokyo: Sansyusya Pub., Co., 1980), pp. 126-127.

[7] Chie Nakane, Japanese Society (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 130-132.

[8] Nishiyama, 1980, 126.

[9] Edwin O. Reischauer, The Japanese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 399.

[10] Kazuo Nishiyama, "Culture and Communication: Japan and the U. S. A.," Communication (July 1973), 91-96.

[11] Reischauer, p. 399.

[12] Nishiyama, 1973, 74.

[13] Yoshi Tsurumi, The Japanese Are Coming: A Multinational Interaction of Firms and Politics (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Pub., Co., 1976), p. 102.

[14] Reischauer, p. 152.

[15] Louis Kaar, "The Japanese Are Coming--With Their Own Style of Management," Fortune Magazine (March 1975), 160.

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[18] Tsurumi, pp. 227-229.

[20] Yoshino, p. 168

[21] Tsurumi, pp. 232-237.

[22] Yoshino, pp. 170-171.

[23] Kume, 120-121.

[24] Richard Tanner Pascale, "Zen and the Art of Management," Harvard Business Review (March-April 1979), 155.